

9th May 2022

Accountable

“What power have you got? Where did you get it from? In whose interests do you exercise it? To whom are you accountable? How do we get rid of you?”

Tony Benn, Questions habitually asked by him of people in power, as defined in his lecture, 'The Independent Mind', in Nottingham in 1993

There's no documentary evidence that the British Labour politician, Tony Benn, actually used the approach outlined above. But the point he makes is an important one. He saw accountability as vital in the sphere of politics and the exercising of power. I regularly appreciate and benefit from accountability in another sphere, my membership of the Iona Community.

I've been a member of the Iona Community since 1973. As such, I am committed to a Rule relating to my spiritual life, a commitment to social and environmental issues, the use of my resources and sharing supportively with other members. Membership is reviewed round about this time every year. The process is called, "With Us", defining the decision to be "with" the Community in all its aspects for another twelve months.

While ultimately in the hands of an individual for a final decision, that "With Us" process is explored and teased out in small groups – the "Family Group" of members who meet regularly in their locality, and often even in smaller units of two or three members. We are accountable to one another for the keeping of our Rule. And that accountability is crucial.

One facet is the use of our resources – time, talents and money. Each member accounts for the dispersal of 10% of their disposable income – to the Iona Community and other causes. But the accountability doesn't stop there, for "10%" could easily become a paper-exercise, like any set of annual accounts. But what about the other 90%? How is *that* used, and to whose benefit? Through nearly 50 years of membership of the Iona Community, the Family Group is the only place where I have been consistently able to talk honestly and openly about money, and to be challenged, with no judgments or comparisons. Accountability works.

In the end, I have to be accountable to myself. But I am *so* grateful for the help I've been given over the years to do that. Can we all look at our lives, commitments and all we have, and say, "I can account for that!"?

A prayer for today

Accountable to myself, others and you, my God. Challenge and growth in all three. Amen

An original reflection by © Tom Gordon

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